1: Hocart Y-5 (ca. 1920) 1929

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Lakemba

# Lau Islands, Fiji

By

A. M. Hocart

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## INTRODUCTION

### SOURCES OF INFORMATION

This book is the outcome of a sojourn of four years in the Fiji Islands. Most of the time was spent in Lakemba, the chief island of Lau, as headmaster of a native school; the remainder, in exploring the whole group, with the generous assistance of Exeter College and Jesus College, Oxford.

I made it my aim to record verbatim all the information I acquired from the natives, using a kind of telegraphic Fijian, mixed with English when only the meaning and not the exact word was caught. This was a most difficult task for one who had only recently acquired a knowledge of the language. It has been necessary, of course, to condense some of this desultory conversation, but on the whole, the book represents the stringing together of native accounts regarding customs and traditions, and descriptions of what I have seen. The original manuscript, however, is preserved by me.

I must express my indebtedness to the Director of Bernice P. Bishop Museum and to his assistants, who in order to render the work intelligible to those unfamiliar with Fijian idioms, have done much arduous work which I could hardly have found the time to do.

By the Lauans, history is strictly distinguished from tales. Tales begin with the announcement *tukuni*—and proceed with *tikotiko* (there was). The narrator aims at making his tale interesting and amusing. History, known as "stories of ancient days," is told informally, but with great care for accuracy. Small inaccuracies are severely criticized behind a man's back.

The Lands Enquiry introduced an unfortunate bias into early history, various parties trying to make out that they had once ruled the land or had reduced the former rulers to complète subjection. Controversies are rendered easy by the fact that history is not remembered as one consecutive story; to Fijians, it consists of detached episodes that strike the imagination. From Niumataiwalu (p. 241) on it is possible to place many of

6: Thompson E-5 (1933-1934) 1947 OQ6 Lau OQ6



clearly in the introduction to *Southern Lau*.[11] Most of the old religion has been lost. The fragmentary account presented in *Southern Lau*[12] was obtained thirteen years ago, mainly from aged informants. It is unlikely that any one of these informants is still living and with them will have perished the main reservoirs of knowledge concerning the most esoteric aspects of the culture. But aside from matters of religion, to state casually that matters such as social groupings are " easily ascertainable " reveals a superficial knowledge of the area, an inference regarding my critics which is amply borne out by a critical appraisal of certain other statements they make regarding southern Lau, as will presently be demonstrated.

Actually, to get a clear picture of the functioning social system of the area it was necessary to make a detailed historical analysis of the social organization in each of the eleven villages on the five inhabited islands surveyed. By a detailed analysis I mean, for example, that genealogies for the 1,500 inhabitants of the five islands were recorded in the field, each as far back as the memory of the natives extended, namely from four to twelve generations, a formidable task in itself. Sketch maps were made of each village and whenever possible kinship groups revealed by the genealogies were related exactly to their localities of residence in each village. This analysis revealed the main social groups, including the thirty-seven clans existent at the time of the field work together with the historical development and rank of each. Patterns regarding marriage, residence, descent and succession were worked out by counting each individual case from four to twelve generations back, and variations on the patterns thus established were calculated on a numerically exact percentage basis. Thus my description of the social system of southern Lau is based, not on a formula worked out by means of research in adjacent areas, nor on generalizations from selected cases, nor on the statements of a few informants, but on *exact numerical calculations* which included every one of the 1,500 residents of the five islands and their genealogies recorded as far back as the memory of the living extended.[13]

The method which I employed in analysing the social system of southern Lau will be recognized as an extension of the genealogical method developed by W. H. R. Rivers[14] in recording the social structure of Melanesia. It is difficult to imagine how a more numerically exact empirical method could be found to analyse an Oceanian social system nor how such an analysis, if systematically carried out, could go " far astray " on the major social groups (both kinship and geographical) and their interrelationships. I therefore submit that there is a high degree of probability that the functioning social system including the major social groups in historical perspective described in *Southern Lau* is correct.

[11] P. 5.

[12] Pp. 105-19.

[13] With the exception of the abstract of the chief's phratry (*Southern Lau*, Table 2) and the village plan of Tokalau (*Southern Lau*, Fig. 3 and Table 1), the genealogies and village plans recorded in the field were not included in *Southern Lau*, due to lack of space, but they are available in manuscript form.

[14] *The History of Melanesian Society*, Cambridge, 1914.

Maps.

126 The maps were constructed as follows:- The outline of the island and the reefs was enlarged four times from the largest scale maps available, ( H.O. Charts 2851 and 2852). This sheet was carried into the field, the outline corrected and the topography sketched in. While no instrument was used, most of the islands were sufficiently small to enable a fair degree of accuracy with the naked eye. The final maps were traced from these field sheets.

104 There has been considerable confusion regarding the spelling of Fijian place names. When the language was reduced to writing by the early missionaries, several short-cuts or contractions of orthography were introduced. The principal of these were as follows:- b was used for mb, d for nd, g for ng, and q for ng-g.

Most of the older maps used these simplified symbols in spelling the names. As this made their pronouncing very difficult for those not fimiliar with the Fijian orthography, the United States Hydrographic Office and other publishers of nautical charts kept the phonetic spelling.

In addition to this, further complications arose because of the [197] differences of pronounciation in different parts of Fiji. The Tongan [177] influence in Lau accounts for the substitution of "Fulanga" for "Vulanga". Even the group is known to the natives on the larger islands as "Viti".

On each island visited special pains were taken to ask the natives [126] the names of all the islands, peaks and districts in sight, and their pronounciation was noted. These were checked against the spelling on the latest Fiji Government map ("corrected to 1924") and, allowing for the variation in pronounciation, they were spelled phonetically. In nearly all cases this spelling agreed with that on the Government map, exept that the double g is here used in the sound ng-g (represented by q in the contracted spelling) as in Nasanggalau.

10:St. Johnston G-5 (no date)1918
OQ6 Lau OQ6



with woven mat-flooring might with few differences be found in parts of Malay to-day. The out-rigger canoe may seem fairly obvious, yet it was not used among western nations. Mariner, in his immortal book on Tonga, mentioned the veiling of women at a very ancient marriage ceremony which he witnessed there in the early days of the nineteenth century; and there are scores of little things like this that the Polynesian must have unconsciously retained despite his centuries of wandering and separation from his ancestral home. The language question is significant in itself; modes of thought and expression are very much the same, and there are more than a few root words to be found that are purely Malayan.

But enough of such theories, fascinating as they may be to the casual observer. Such things may safely be left in the hands of professional ethnologists. I have merely endeavoured to set down in this book some of the old legends and fairy stories of a people whom, with all their faults, I dearly love, and among whom I have lived and carried on my work for nearly ten years as Commissioner of their District. I take no credit for these tales, which are exactly as told to me by the natives themselves, and are selected from a big book of notes that I have made at odd times during my long residence amongst them. The apparently "biblical" language is

10:St. Johnston G-5 (no date) 1918
OQ6 Lau OQ6



126 114 merely a literal translation of their stories, and tends to show how closely akin they are to the Eastern minds in their ideas.

000 I once possessed a further series of notes that I took from chats with two old chiefs now dead; but, alas! a hurricane with a tidal wave swept that set of papers away, and the data are now lost for ever. Some of my predecessors, notably Sir George Le Hunte, G.C.M.G., Mr. Basil Thomson, C.B., and Mr. C. R. Swayne, C.M.G., were, I know, very interested in Lauan legends; but I fancy many of their notes met similar untimely ends; and I know that Mr. Swayne suffered a great loss of the labour of years when the official residence—in those early days simply a thatched bungalow—was burnt to the ground with all his belongings. Mr. Thomson's great study of the customs of the natives, in his well-known and classical work, "The Fijians," embraces every question possible concerning them, but in this little book I have confined myself entirely to legendary folk-lore, and to the people of the Lau Islands, whom I know best. So, then, with the hope that some of these old legends may be rescued from oblivion before it is too late, I have launched them into print, and leave their merits for the reader to decide.

T. R. St. J.

*Lomaloma,*
*The Lau Islands.*